

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 1708

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, VT, RO

SUBJECT: ARCHBISHOP POGGI'S VISIT TO ROMANIA

SUMMARY: POGGI'S TALKS WITH GOR HELD IN CORDIAL ATMOSPHERE AND, ALTHOUGH NOTHING DECIDED, POGGI ANTICIPATES THAT FUTURE GOR LAW GOVERNING RELIGION MAY PROVIDE BASIS FOR CONCLUDING STATUTE FOR ROMAN CATHOLICS. POGGI ALSO HOPEFUL THAT GOR WILL DROP ITS INSISTENCE ON COMBINING DIOCESES OF IASI AND BUCHAREST. END SUMMARY.

1. ARCHBISHOP LUIGI POGGI, VATICAN'S ROVING EXPERT ON EASTERN EUROPE, GAVE US BRIEF DESCRIPTION FEB 4 OF HIS TWO-WEEK VISIT TO ROMANIA LAST MONTH. IN ADDITION TO BUCHAREST, POGGI VISITED TIMISOARA, ALBA JULIA AND IASI. BOTH HE AND HIS ASSISTANT, FATHER JOHN BUKOVSKY, STAYED WITH CATHOLIC CLERGY AT ALL POINTS DURING TRIP. LENGTHY TALKS BEGAN AND ENDED VISIT WITH OFFICIAL IN CHARGE OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, DOGARU, AND AN ASSISTANT RESPONSIBLE FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION REPRESENTING GOR. DAY BEFORE DEPARTURE, POGGI AND BUKOVSKY WERE INFORMED THAT EMIL BODNARAS WOULD RECEIVE THEM IN WHAT THEY ANTICIPATED WOULD BE A COURTESY CALL, BUT, MUCH TO THEIR SURPRISE, TALKS LASTED FOR FIVE FULL HOURS.

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2. AT GOR REQUEST, IT WAS DECIDED TO CONSIDER LAST MONTH'S

VISIT "FIRST OFFICIAL VISIT" BY VATICAN OFFICIALS TO ROMANIA DESPITE FACT THAT POGGI ONCE BEFORE AND MSGR. GIOVANNI CHELI ON TWO OCCASIONS HAD VISITED COUNTRY. TALKS WERE CONDUCTED IN CORDIAL ATMOSPHERE AND, ACCORDING TO POGGI, VATICAN DECIDED TO PLACE QUESTION OF ROMANIAN UNIATE CHURCH ASIDE IN ORDER TO CONCENTRATE ON OTHER MATTERS, BUT MADE AMPLY CLEAR TO GOR THAT VATICAN COMPLETELY INTRANSIGENT ON QUESTION OF UNIATES AND THAT NO TOTAL SOLUTION OF BILATERAL PROBLEMS POSSIBLE UNTIL IT SETTLED. RE LATIN RITE CATHOLICS, VATICAN ATTEMPTING TO ALTER GOR INSISTENCE THAT DIOCESES OF IASI AND BUCHAREST BE COMBINED ON BASIS OF PRESENT LAW GOVERNING RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS WHICH STATES THAT DIOCESE MUST HAVE MINIMUM OF 750,00 FAITHFUL. VATICAN AWARE, HOWEVER, THAT GOR INSISTENCE ON UNITING TWO DIOCESES AND HAVING BISHOP RESIDE IN BUCHAREST, WHICH HAS ONLY MODEST NUMBER OF CATHOLICS, IS SIMPLY RUSE TO PLACE MAJOR CATHOLIC LEADER UNDER THUMB OF GOVERNMENT. POGGI EXPECTS SOME FLEXIBILITY ON THIS QUESTION SINCE GOR HAS ASSURED HIM NEW LAW ON RELIGION WILL BE ISSUED SOME TIME THIS YEAR AND THAT PRESENT MINIMUM SIZE REQUIREMENTS ON DIOCESES LIKELY TO BE REMOVED. ONLY BODNARAS RAISED WITH POGGI QUESTION OF STATUTE FOR CATHOLIC CHURCH, NOTING THAT ONLY MAJOR FAITH WITHOUT ONE TODAY IS ROMAN CATHOLIC. IN ADDITION TO UNIATE QUESTION, MAJOR STUMBLING BLOCK IN CONSIDERING A STATUTE HAS BEEN GOR UNWILLINGNESS TO RECOGNIZE THAT CATHOLICS OWE A SPIRITUAL ALLEGIANCE TO FOREIGN AUTHORITY, NAMELY THE POPE. HOWEVER, IN LATEST DISCUSSIONS POGGI SENSED CONSIDERABLE FLEXIBILITY EVEN ON THIS POINT. TO OUR QUESTION OF WHETHER VATICAN MIGHT BE ABLE TO NEGOTIATE STATUTE APPLICABLE ONLY TO LATIN RITE CATHOLICS WITH GOR, HE SAID THIS WAS HIS HOPE BUT GOR WOULD HAVE TO PERMIT VATICAN MAKE PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT STATING ITS POSITION OF CONTINUED SPIRITUAL CLAIM ON MEMBERS OF FORMER ROMANIAN UNIATE CHURCH.

3. IN SEPARATE CONVERSATIONS LAST WEEK, FATHER BUKOVSKY TOLD US THAT HE BELIEVES CATHOLIC CHURCH HAS BETTER RELATIONS WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN ROMANIA THAN IN OTHER EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. ALTHOUGH ROMANIAN LAWS ARE OF SAME TOUGHNESS, GOR FREQUENTLY DOES NOT APPLY THEM. CONTRARY TO CASE IN POLAND WHERE CHURCH CONSTRUCTION IS MAJOR OBSTACLE, ROMANIAN CATHOLICS ARE BUILDING CONSIDERABLE NUMBER OF NEW CHURCHES. MOREOVER, GOVERNMENT PERMITS ITS PRESSES TO PRINT RELIGIOUS LITERATURE.

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HE NOTED THAT WHILE ATHEISM IS OFFICIALLY TAUGHT AT SCHOOLS THERE ARE RARELY PUBLIC OR PRESS ATTACKS AGAINST INDIVIDUAL CHURCHES OR CHURCH LEADERS. BUKOVSKY SAID THAT SOME CATHOLIC LEADERS WERE IRRITATED THAT WHILE IN BUCHAREST HE AND POGGI HAD STAYED WITH THE ACTING VICAR OF THE DIOCESE, A MAN WHOM MANY ROMANIAN CLERGY CRITICIZE FOR HIS ALLEGED CLOSENESS TO REGIME. THIS IS UNFAIR CRITICISM, SAID BUKOVSKY, SINCE AS A BUCHAREST-BASED CHURCH LEADER, HE IS OBLIGED BY THE GOVERNMENT TO ATTEND

MANY OFFICIAL PUBLIC FUNCTIONS AND THAT IN RALITY HE IS A RATHER
INDEPENDENT AND DEDICATED CLERGYMAN. NEITHER POGGI NOR
BUKOVSKY HAD ANY CONTACTS WITH ORTHODOX CLERGY. VOLPE

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